

Vote No on Charter Amendment C.

By Council members Nancy Floreen & Marilyn Praisner

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If Charter Question C were adopted, voters could no longer vote for a majority of the Council - one district member and four at-large members. Instead, each voter could only support a single district member. Proponents claim this will help newcomers get elected, make Councilmembers more responsive to citizens, and reduce the influence of "special interests" on elections. We beg to differ. And worse, we think it would work to reverse Montgomery County's long heritage of balanced and consistent policy-making county wide. This is why.

The last election proved that:

- Newcomers can win and incumbency does not guarantee smooth sailing. Four new Councilmembers gained office, including a minority candidate and a woman. Two incumbents were defeated – one from a district, one at-large.
- Money does not ensure success. Of the winning candidates in both the at-large and district races, the ones who spent the least money garnered the most votes. (That's us.)

Amendment C would actually reduce access and influence for the average voter:

- If residents could vote for just one Councilmember, they would **lose** access to County decision makers. No longer could a resident unhappy with the district Councilmember's positions or performance turn elsewhere for help.
- All single districts would yield increased parochialism and vote trading. Councilmembers would have no incentive to care about needs in a faraway district. That problem is why Prince George's County residents will vote on a charter amendment to **add** at-large members this fall.

The role of money is not changing:

- Campaign contributions by "special interests" won't go away. Donors will seek a sympathetic ear no matter what the Council's structure. Only legislation regulating campaign contributions could address this.
- It's not necessarily cheaper to run in a district. Funds raised in some recent district races have been as high as those raised by at-large candidates. Campaign costs increase as more candidates compete and issues grow hotter. That's politics.

Amendment C proponents correctly argue that it's difficult for at-large members to represent a specific constituency. But we think that's a good thing! Montgomery County has complicated issues that require complicated answers –

from all of us. Speaking for both camps, we know that we may not please every constituency every time we raise our hands. But we think that's a fair price to pay for balancing competing interests on a county-wide basis. It's not a problem that we need Amendment C to fix. Vote no.

Nancy Floreen (D-Garrett Park) is an at-large Councilmember serving her first term. Marilyn Praisner (D-Calverton) is serving her fourth term as the Councilmember representing District 4.